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ABSTRACT

This publication is a followup report to Public Agenda's 1994 study on public-school education, entitled "First Things First." The publication reports findings of a 1995 study that investigated the public's perspective on school restructuring. Data were derived from a national telephone survey of 1,200 Americans, including 439 parents of children in school and 237 public-school teachers; and a mail survey of 734 decision makers in government, business, the media, and 417 educational administrators. Findings indicate that despite their disappointment with public schools, most people were not ready to dismantle the public education system. However, they were confused and frustrated about how to get the system to work--to provide the environment and standards conducive to teaching and learning. Second, 9 in 10 Americans (92%) agreed that teaching basics such as reading, writing, and arithmetic was "absolutely essential." Third, people strongly supported the creation and enforcement of higher academic standards, which they believed would improve student motivation and increase learning. Finally, most respondents did not place a high value on knowledge for its own sake. Fifty-nine percent of the general public said that a diploma is important because employers are reluctant to hire people without one, while 60 percent of leaders said that a diploma is important because it represents skills and knowledge that are useful on the job. Seven tables, methodological notes, and a list of related Public Agenda publications are included. (LMI)

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